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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown that school transition may have an impact on early adolescent self-image. In order to examine the effects of school and grade transition on early adolescent self-image, and to examine the duration of these effects, the Personal Opinion Survey (POS), containing nine measures of self-image, was administered to 296 fifth and sixth grade students who were projected to enter the same middle school the following year. Following the school transition, the same students completed the POS four times during the first 9 weeks of the new school year. Analysis of results revealed significant transition effects in measures of self-consciousness, victimization, and anonymity. The effects of transition had dissipated by the 9th week of the new school year, indicating that the "detriments" to self-image attributable to school transition were transitory. (BH)

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ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIATORS OF EARLY ADOLESCENT SELF-IMAGE

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Abstract

A study was conducted to examine the impact of school transition upon early adolescent self-image. A questionnaire, containing nine measures of self-image, was administered to 296 fifth and sixth grade students who were projected to enter the same middle school the following year. Following the transition, the same students completed the questionnaire four times during the first nine weeks of the new school year. Analysis revealed significant transition (Time 1 and Time 2 comparisons) effects in measures of self-consciousness, victimization, and anonymity. The effects of transition had dissipated by the ninth week (Time 1 to Time 5) of the new school year.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIATORS OF EARLY ADOLESCENT SELF-IMAGE

Studies yielding practical information for educators are notably scarce amidst the rapidly expanding literature addressing early adolescent social and personality development. A potentially useful line of inquiry, however, has emerged via the work of Roberta Simmons and her colleagues (Blyth, Simmons, & Bush, 1978; Simmons, Brown, Bush, & Blyth, 1978; Simmons, Blyth, VanCleave, & Bush, 1979; Simmons & Rosenberg, 1975; Simmons, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1973). In each of these studies, self-esteem was employed as the dependent measure, with school structure and other social or environmental events and perceptions used as predictor variables. Essentially, the Simmons et al., research has demonstrated that early adolescents who move into grade seven in a 7-9 junior high structure experience lower self-esteem and other related social problems than those moving into grade seven within a K-8 structure. Furthermore, when considering other factors such as anonymity, victimizaiton, puberty, and dating; these variables appear to contribute to lower self-esteem in the junior high/middle school environment as compared to the K-8 structural configuration.

Unfortunately, several inconsistencies between these studies and their subsequent findings have increased the complexity in making definitive interpretation and inference. Aside from a

plethora of theoretical paradigms underlying the research designs in these particular studies (thus necessitating the implementation of diverse methodologies), the measurement of self-esteem has varied from one study to the next. A number of self-report indexes and interview strategies have been employed to study the changing adolescent character. The most popular instruments appear to be the Coopersmith (1967) batteries, and the Rosenberg (1965) forms. Ironically, several forms of each currently exist, and several versions of each have been used to study adolescent social development.

Regardless of these methodological problems, the Simmons et al., studies have demonstrated that the total number of developmental changes occurring between grade six and seven are further impacted by having to change school structures, moving into an unfamiliar environment, reorganizing peer groups, and moving from a self-contained to a single subject discipline school day. While it is hard to argue with these sets of contentions, several practical issues deserve empirical attention. First, the Simmons et al.,[4] efforts raise the question as to whether transition into a different school structure might be more easily facilitated if the transition occurred one year earlier, when the adolescents are prepuberal and pretransitional thinkers, i.e., moving them into grade six in a 6-8 structure rather than into grade seven in a 6-8 or 9 structure, or if transition is disruptive regardless of school structure. Secondly, questions

related to duration and intensity of these transitional "problems" deserve attention. Simmons et al., (1973) acknowledges the fact that their study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal (thus generally limiting the conclusiveness of their findings) and openly admit that "we cannot be certain that age differences represent actual changes, particularly in the higher school grades" (p. 566). Finally, if the Simmons et al., findings are indeed valid; that "the emergence of self-image problems in adolesence is no myth, and that these problems occur early in adolescence" (p. 565), and that "part of the problem was due to a marked change in the child's school environment at that point"; the practical implications associated with altering junior high/middle school structural environments also deserve attention.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to document the mediational effects of school and grade transition upon early adolescent self-image; (2) to address questions regarding the timing of transition; and (3) to examine the duration and intensity of possible transitional effects upon early adolescent self-image.

Sample

A total of 367 fifth and sixth graders were identified in the Spring 1982, from district projection lists specific to one 6-8

middle school. This sample represented five separate schools; one K-5 school, three K-6 schools, and one 6-8 school. Subjects were administered a questionnaire two weeks prior to the end of the 1982 school year, three days into the 1983 school year and three more times during the first quarter of the new school year. A total of 296 early adolescents responded to all five administrations of the questionnaire. The duration of the study was 34 weeks.

Measurement

The Personal Opinion Survey (POS) was composed of nine self-image measures that had been utilized with early adolescents in either self-image research or investigations focusing upon school transition. The self-image constructs included the Simmons et al. (1973) measures of self-esteem, stability of self-image, content of self-image, self-consciousness, and perceived self-image; the Blyth et al (1978) measures of anonymity and victimization; the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale; and the Savin-Willilams et al. (1983) self-esteem index.

Procedures

Math, English, and social studies (the core curriculum) teachers administered the POS to all of the identified subjects. Since three transitional conditions (the 5th and 6th feeder school conditions; the 6th to 7th same school condition) accompanied

multiple assessment occasions, the study design closely resembled a cross-sectional time lag strategy which was most appropriate for answering the questions posed in this study.

A series of analyses were conducted to examine the psychometric appropriateness of the selected self-image measures prior to the hypothesis testing. With the exception of the stability of self-image scale, all measures exhibited acceptable levels of reliability (internal consistency and test-retest stability) and validity (convergent and divergent).

To test the hypotheses, variations of a 2 (subject gender) X3 (transitional condition) X5 (assessment occasions) mixed model (the between subject factors were subject gender and transitional condition; the within factor was assessment occasions), multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) with repeated measures technique was implemented.

Findings

Transition effects (as evidenced by Time 1 and Time 2 comparisons) were observed on the measures of self-consciouness, victimization, and anonymity only. Perceptions of anonymity and victimization were significantly greater at the start of a new school year (Time 2) than they had been prior to transition (Time 1). Self-consciousness scores showed a significant decrease from pre- to post-transition. Both the Rosenberg and Savin-Williams self-esteem measures increased from Time 1 to Time 2, however, the

increases were not statistically significant. Transitional effects were not observed on the Simmons self-esteem scale, the stability of self-image measure, and both the content of and perceived self-image scales.

The timing of transition comparisons evolve from the transitional condition with time (1 and 2) interactions. Significant effects were observed on the self-consciousness, victimization, and anonymity measures. Both feeder school conditions expressed significantly greater perceptions of self-consciousness and victimization than students making the transition within the same school. The 6th to 7th grade feeder cohort expressed significantly higher perceptions of anonymity, than the 5th to 6th grade feeder cohort which was significantly greater than that of the 6th to 7th grade same-school group. Time of transition exerts no measurable impact on the constructs of stability of self-image, and all three measures of self-esteem.

For duration of transitional effects (all five measurement occasions), nonsignificant effects were observed on all nine self-image constructs.

Collectively, the immediate impact of transition upon early adolescent self-consciousness, and perceptions of victimization and anonymity, was not measurable nine weeks into the new school year. The "detriments" to self-image attributable to school

transition were transitory at best. Likewise, timing of transition (i.e., 5th or 6th grade) was a moot point nine weeks into the new school year.

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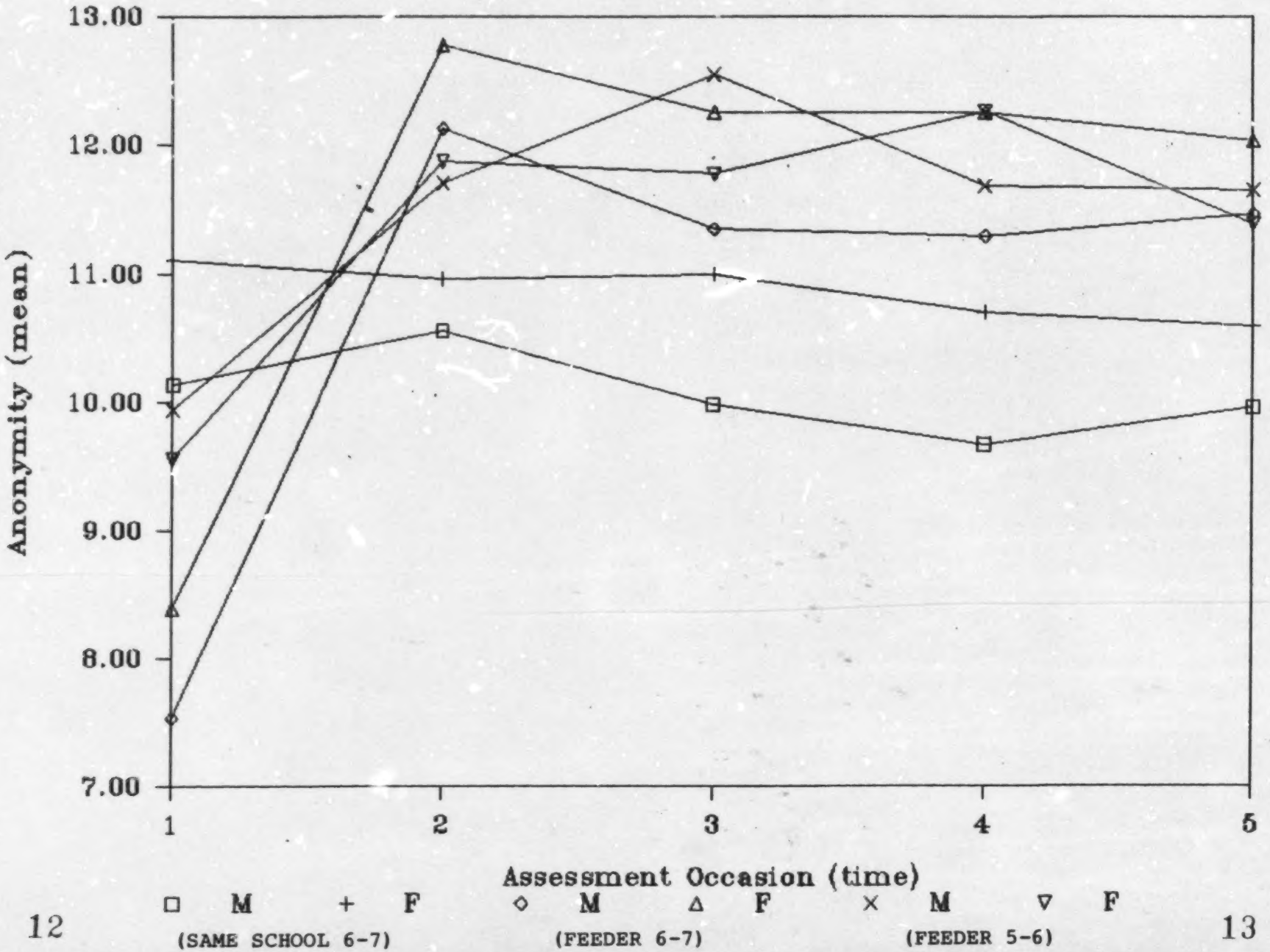
Transitional Condition



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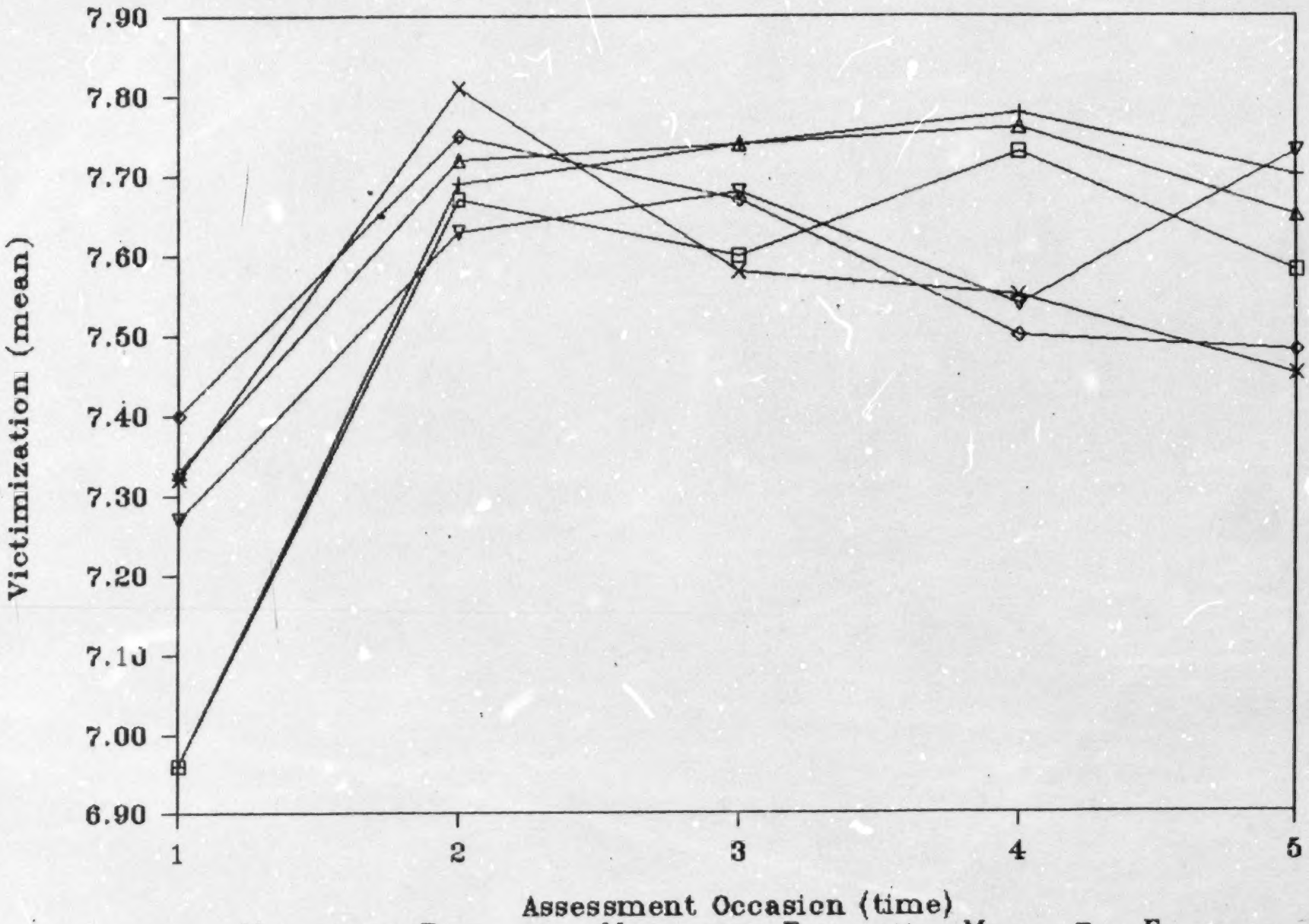

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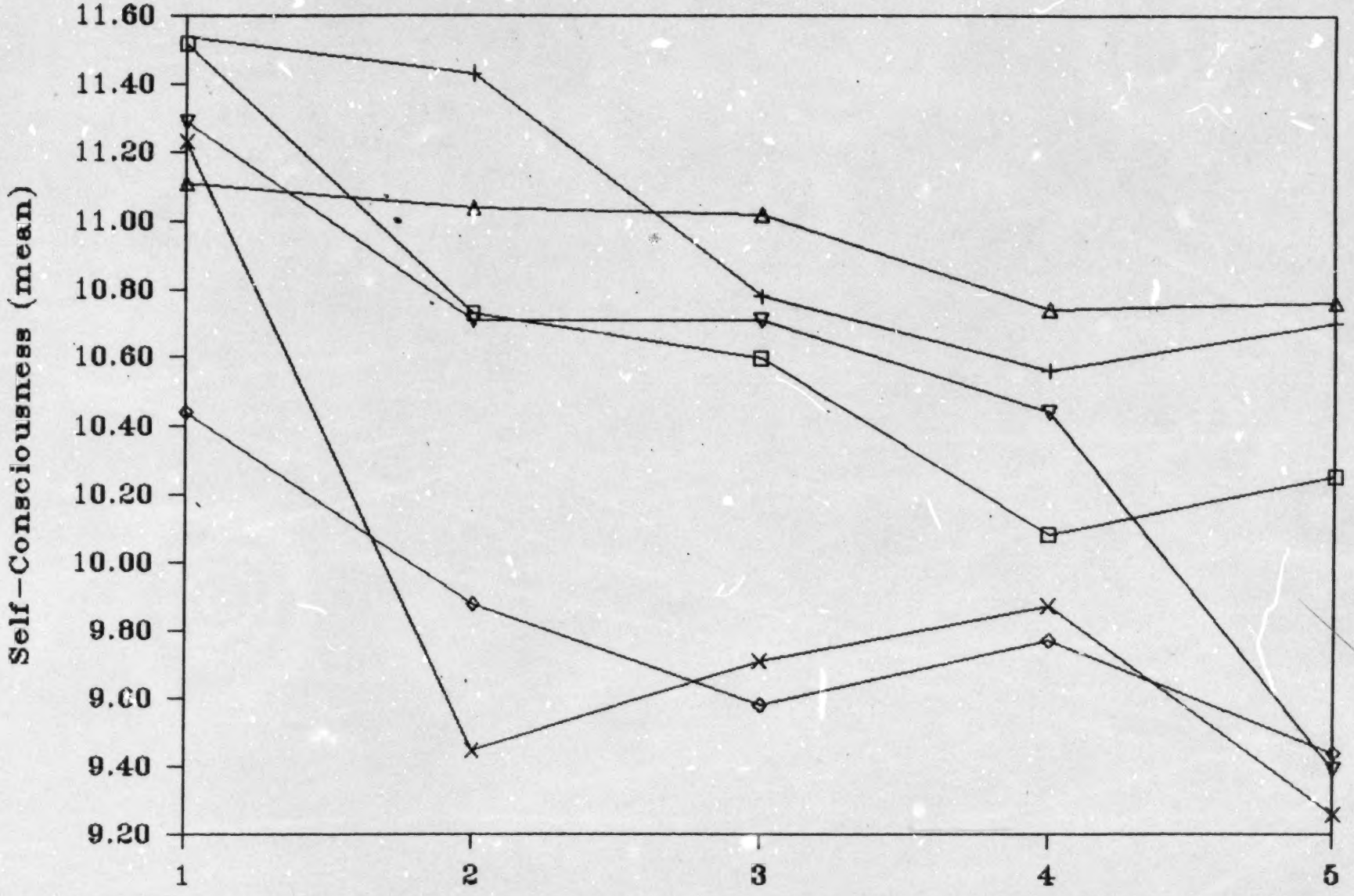

Transitional Condition